

Sermon of Pfarrer Rolf Brandt, Sunday 16th May, 2010, at Holy Cross Church

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one; I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved before the creation of the world. Righteous father, though the world does not know you, I know you and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” John 17, 20-26



As part of his farewell speeches Jesus says what is really important. That is his testament, his legacy, also for us. What is he doing? Jesus prays for us. And we are in need of his prayers. Since we are all people with a different life story. Everyone of us has got disruptions in his life. As broken ones we need his prayer, his advocacy, his help. Jesus himself lifts us up. Cures us. He puts the pieces of our life back together to a new, meaningful whole. This is how he calls us to be part of his worldwide denomination.

The heavenly unity of his disciples is founded in the unity of father and son and it is everlasting. Therefore, the unity of all the believers is an image of the unity of father and son and cannot be considered separately.

The word of God is our cause, foundation and direction.
Across all denominations and more important than these boundaries.
Everyone is invited to be part of this denomination.

The unity that Jesus talks about adverts to the believers of all times. The believers in their entirety.
For this reason he turns against the deeply human question; Who is right!
He transfers this question into the challenge of the church and its believers;
How can I serve God?
The question who is right is not the question of the servants!
To carry on the message of God is the duty of the believers of all times.
The first step is accepting that Christ is the saviour of the world, he is the Messiah.
The second step is that I accept this for myself and live accordingly.
The third step is to pass on this faith.
With words and acts.

I am not allowed to keep Christ for myself, he lives on when we pass on our faith.
This is why the story of Jesus is not the past but our present and future.

Ascension Day: Jesus is enhanced, so that everyone can see him.
Ascension Day is a strange festivity; a festivity of loss.
Jesus finally left his disciples. After his death and resurrection he is suddenly gone.
But still it is a happy day because Christ is there

We have the promise that we quote at every baptism: "Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Heaven doesn't have to be the aim of our aspirations and hopes.

Today the Lord is with us.

Those who assign heaven to God, who banish him to heaven, who reserve the earth for the people, have not comprehended. Where people gather God is among them.

Jesus bids farewell as he prays for those who were with him and those who are united with him in faith. He prays for unity. Now the son leaves and leaves his followers behind with the Spirit and his love. The aim is that they are all one: church in the unity of the Spirit. Jesus prays for those who listen to his word, who learn for their life. Jesus prays for us.

Christians should lead their life in a way that one can feel the truth within them. And the truthfulness of their faith. Knowing the name of God and the message of Christ means: Knowing Jesus and internalising his love. There have always been conflicts in the congregation.

Jesus himself did not avoid conflicts. But he asks us to live with the conflicts in the congregation. Maybe it is also a demand to solve our own conflicts, to live together in the difference of the denominations but still in unity because we know that we belong together. The unity of the church, the unity of brothers and sisters is not an abstract demand but a true unity of brothers and sisters who come together despite everything that separates them. Pray together and come together at the table of the Lord.

Jesus knows how important it is to stay in his community. There is an old picture: A dying father asks his sons to break a pack of staves. Only he who separates the staves is able to break them. The pack is more than the sum of its parts. The church is more than the sum of single people. It is the unity of brothers and sisters.

Despite all farewell speeches; Jesus does not leave us. As a sign for this he has given us the sacrament. He proved this with his promise that whenever people gather and break the bread and drink the wine in his name, he is there.

Only when churches and congregations see their differences as a chance they are growing. Only when each Christian understands that it is not about having the grand entrance, congregations can develop. Only when something good comes from the different talents, church can develop in the unity of the Spirit and in the different colours of faith.

Jesus' farewell speech.

Jesus leaves his followers and trusts them to build congregations to live in his promise and love.

Ascension Day: a glance towards heaven, which can give us assurance on earth.

I know: he is gone but he does not leave us alone. But he accompanies us and helps us to live our faith as a grown disciple of his worldwide congregation. At the end I would like to quote a prayer that I heard in a very touching confirmation service. 16 year-olds expressed their wish to be part of the worldwide congregation of Christians.

Here we are together in difference.

Here we are together in peace.

Here we are to praise the Lord united in faith.

This is our past, present and future.

To bring the love of God to the people. Amen.

